

# The Classical Bulletin

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## The Philosophy of Vergil

Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum  
tendimus in Latium.

(Aen. I, 204-5)

The circumstances of our teaching make almost impossible anything but a fragmentary study of the classical masterpieces. The artist created a unity; we, unfortunately, are forced to attend to mere details here and there, to the episodes of Vergil or the lyric outbursts of Lucretius. And so it happens that an appreciation of their true greatness is rare, even among talented students. Often the creative art, the vital insight of the poet is entirely missed, and his decorative skill, so to speak, seized upon as the secret of his genius. Thus, Vergil's *flair* for beautiful phrases is recognized by all and widely admired. The beauty of his pathetic half-lines—

All the chosen coin of fancy  
Flashing out from many a golden phrase,

his episodes, like that of Nisus and Euryalus, his  
sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt,  
(I, 462)

and similar lines, none of these have escaped us; indeed, it is largely for these that most of us admire and praise Vergil. But to praise Vergil for these things, however excellent they are, is to praise him for the wrong things. Such "coin of fancy" he minted well, but so have most true poets. The real praise of Vergil is a unique thing that belongs to him alone. The true greatness of Vergil can be found only by him who has read and lived the whole *Aeneid*.

I say "lived," for a man may well enough have read the *Aeneid* from cover to cover—and missed its greatest significance. A man can hear the central theme of a symphony only when it answers his heart. So might an assiduous reader of Vergil see in him only the prophet of Greater Rome.

Romanos rerum dominos gentemque togatam,  
(I, 282)

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento,  
(VI, 851)

hic domus Aeneae cunctis dominabitur oris  
et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis.  
(III, 97-98)

I do not mean to deny the magnificence of this theme nor the magnificent way in which Vergil handled it. The *Pax Romana* and the *Imperium Romanum*, which in their unity stood grand against the discord and confusion of the Hellenic world, are caught into the stuff

of the *Aeneid* and brilliantly condensed into those many short but famous lines. This was indeed a Vergilian achievement.

And yet, there is a deeper significance, a larger meaning in the *Aeneid*. There is a significance that can never be outgrown, that will last to the end of human-kind, that survives even when rabid republicans destroy men's respect for an ancient empire founded on the primacy of one man. There is a meaning that Vergil would inevitably have put into his maturer work, even had he written of other things than war and the pride of Rome, even had he been too republican to glorify the republic's destroyer. This significance lies in the world view which is embodied in that work; it is that fruit of long meditation which has, from time immemorial, been called *wisdom*. This Vergilian vision we find first hinted in the *Georgics*; in the *Aeneid* it has come to full maturity. It is the spiritual content of the *Aeneid*, a light shining from a wise mind on human life. "After the arid Puritanism of Cato and the scientific pessimism of Lucretius there comes the profoundly spiritual and catholic genius of Vergil who embodies the ideal of the Augustan movement in one of the world's greatest religious poems."<sup>1</sup> The *Aeneid* is immortal because in it Vergil rose, at last, beyond the limitations of academic art, to a view "profoundly spiritual."

If, then, I have entitled this paper "The Philosophy of Vergil," it is in no narrow sense that I use the word "philosophy." For the Orphic phrases or the Stoic conceptions that the careful scholar may find in Vergil mean little to the student of literature. The philosophy of the "sects" was infinitely below the catholic mind of Vergil: they—Stoic, Epicurean, Academician—part among themselves the whole garment of truth. They explain, indeed, but by oversimplification.<sup>2</sup> Easy is it to untangle the threads of reality when you cut half of them away! But to keep them all, each as it intertwines with each, to hold the tangle up and see in it the continuous whole—that is work only for genius and not for the petty schools.

The philosophy of Vergil, then, is a large thing, indeed too large and pervasive to admit of logical arrangement or analysis. The *Aeneid* is complex and subtle even as life itself; there is the same bewildering mixture of motives, the same tangle of lives, the same matter for endless meditation. I fear, therefore, that it is an impossible task to portray truly the universality of Vergil's genius. More easily perhaps could one interpret even the mystic and magical *Oedipus Coloneus* or the *Prometheus Vincetus*, for in these, too, we have the same profundity of understanding that is beyond the logic of plain thought or the words of plain speech.

Yet, one can at least try, and perhaps by indicating some main lines of development, set in higher relief the true majesty of the *Aeneid*, its spiritual power, its heightened portrayal of human life.

This last is not mere rhetoric; the vitality of Vergil's *Aeneid* lies precisely in this, that it is an exposition, in the warm stuff of poetry, of the central problem of life. For, in the large, the subject matter of the *Aeneid* is *human action*. By human action I mean the working out of life as it molds and is molded by the paradoxical and unique will of man: unique, because it is alone in the material universe and by its presence in man makes his very eating and drinking of a different world from the eating and drinking of the brute; paradoxical, because it is not sufficient to itself, because it wills and wills not, because it reaches beyond for help and is, seemingly, thwarted and directed by another power above it that men have called fate or the will of God. This central problem of life Vergil has not treated in the dry manner of the academic philosopher, but, true to his poetry, he has incarnated it in a man, and has written it large in the epic sweep of high destiny. The shape of human destiny and human desire is, indeed, as multiple as the human race, and the old story is repeated in all seriousness with every human being. But Vergil has caught up the essential thing and accentuated it by working it out in the large; nevertheless, his solution remains true of every man, and his epic might be called the pagan's Pilgrim's Progress, in which the Pilgrim, seeing dimly, stretches forward not alone to the Latium in Hesperia, but more to the greater Latium of high character and divine command.

We must realize that genuine human action, as I have described it, begins in Aeneas's life with the first hint of his high destiny. We must distinguish the Aeneas of environment and the Aeneas of purpose. We may illustrate from ordinary life. As men grow up they tend to "ride" on their environment, to be carried along on the opinions and habits they have unconsciously absorbed from tradition and home. They often remain children long; for children they are while in this passive state. Sooner or later, however, there comes into human life the realization that above the eating and drinking, above the routine of what Belloc calls "the digging of holes and the filling of them up again," there is an impelling destiny. Faintly a man begins to feel the call of a destiny which is more than to

Sweat and make his brag and rot.

Then human action in the full sense begins; will comes into play as a genuine force shaping the life of a man and, by its reaction, producing character. Now, this, in some fashion, happened to Aeneas.

When the alarm was given on the night Troy fell, Aeneas was a Trojan prince, a warrior like his fellows in arms. His first impulse drove him to frenzied resistance—*arma amens capio*—and he would have died there in the walls, loyal to his ancestral city, had there not come upon him in the flames and the darkness a larger thing, the shadowy realization of a call more imperious than sentiment. His whole training impelled him to hopeless fight, to slaughter of the Greeks, to

death with his fellows. But now the strange summons brings mind and will into play, as in a new situation for which his past mental patterns have not prepared him.

Gradually the divine command is given him, and, as is the way of heaven, the first indications are short and vague:

eripe, nate, fugam finemque impone labori,  
nusquam abero et tutum patrio te limine sistam.  
(II, 619-20)

Guarantee of safety only to his own threshold! At once, however, his fighting fever is cooled by the vision:

apparent dirae facies inimicaeque Troiae  
numina magna deum . . .  
(II, 622-23)

It is the beginning of that development which will proceed in a direct line to the end of the Sixth Book.<sup>3</sup> During this time two forces will play on the freely moving will of Aeneas, suffering and revelation, the inevitable instruments of God. The final maturity of understanding will be the combined effect of the mental discipline which suffering brings and of the gradual revelation of the designs of heaven. For the school of pain is the truest school of wisdom, and if the

. . . . . forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit  
(I, 203)

is true, often it is true in virtue of a higher understanding that in retrospect illumines the pains of the past.

At the very outset the union of the two (of sorrow and revelation) is signally indicated, for it is the

. . . . . ipsius umbra Creusae,  
(II, 772)

the first lost of his dear ones, that comes to reveal in clearness,

et terram Hesperiam venies, ubi Lydius arva  
inter opima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris.  
(II, 781-82)

So Aeneas turns himself from fallen Troy; he has survived his own hearth and native land. He has lost Creusa; he has lost his resources,

. . . . . nec spes opis ulla dabatur.  
(II, 803)

Yet as he took up his father and strode into the hills, he had in his mind a new aim, and he dreamed, vaguely, of the

terra antiqua, potens armis atque ubere glabrae.  
(III, 164)

As the story of Aeneas is a story of his hardening into a character, so it is a story of a growing alone, a growing away from things loved, a putting aside of the sweet and pleasant, a strengthening of the resolve,

. . . . . sequimur te, sancte deorum.  
(IV, 576)

Every step is marked with loss. At the end of the great wanderings of the Third Book, in which the revelation grows more pronounced, Anchises is taken from him. Anchises has, throughout the book, played the part of master and adviser; now Aeneas faces the future alone. His rashness must learn now by hard failure. So he comes to Libya, driven by a storm which has dispersed and perhaps destroyed many of his followers. His sorrow is greater to him, as yet, than his destiny, and throughout the First Book the hardness of the Trojans' lot is the predominant note.

..... mene Iliacis occumbere campis  
non potuisse!

(I, 97-8)

..... curisque ingentibus aeger  
spem vultu simulat;

(I, 208-9)

ipse ignotus, egens, Libyae deserta peragro,  
Europa atque Asia pulsus;

(I, 384-5)

quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?  
(I, 460)

He has, however, undergone a preliminary discipline, and now he seems ready for the greater trial. Pressed as he is with loneliness and suffering, the gods seem to throw him in the way of failure. He who longs for the walls of a new city, alone now with only Ascanius for his love, is led to a city prepared, to walls already rising, and to a queen, munificent and, soon, madly in love. Could he who so felt the wanderings around the seas and shores of the world, could he but settle here! Why stretch on to a Latium around which war clouds were gathered and before which were unknown dangers?

Shall we say he failed? Strange how the high ideas can blur in the sweetness of things loved! But he was not entirely blinded. That he did not fully profess a perpetual union shows the consciousness that his destiny was not here. When again the touch of the god, the grace of a divine summons, came on him, he was ready. Those who see in Aeneas a hard and unheroic figure before the weeping Dido miss, I believe, the whole point of the picture. Not the sweetest love can stand against a divine command. Men who look on it otherwise make of love not alone the beautiful thing it is, but a very god whose whim is heaven's will. It is the very fashioning of Aeneas that he stood before Dido tenderly

... multa metu cunctantem et multa parantem  
dicere,

(IV, 390)

and yet did not forget his own call to Italy:

hic amor, haec patria est.

(IV, 347)

This, the supreme renunciation, when he turned him alone and unloved of woman to the cold seas—

..... sequimur te, sancte deorum,  
(IV, 576)

—this made him worthy of the final revelation of the Sixth Book.

I may be permitted to pause here. My sketch so far might seem to indicate that I look on Vergil as an ethical theorist. It is this view that I most strongly oppose. My sketch, let it be remembered, is only a sketch, and therefore apt to mislead. In the *Aeneid* itself the development is full of the rich imperfections of life, is balanced and complete.

From the viewpoint so far taken, Dido has been only an instrument of the gods, the supreme test of the heroic character. But, in reality she is far more than this. A poor artist might have made her merely a siren, a seducer, and aroused no sympathy for her. But Vergil was great enough to remember that, though carrying a subordinate rôle in the life of Aeneas, Dido was nevertheless, an individual human problem with her own will and destiny. So he made her character attractive and pathetic—as are so many of the characters that come into the story of the *Aeneid*. She almost stands by herself as an embodiment of many aspects of Vergilian philosophy. She is undone by her own rash love,—not wisely but too well did she love,—yet in our hearts we cannot find condemnation; there is sympathy. After all, we see but a little way, and the shores that received the soul of Dido we do not know; around her the mists of the government of the world are black indeed. So, I think, did Vergil himself see her, and he was alive to all the pathos of her death, yet not so as to lose his ultimate trust.

Nam quia nec fato merita nec morte peribat,  
sed misera ante diem subitoque accensa furore,  
nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem  
abstulerat Stygioque caput damnaverat Orco.  
ergo Iris croceis per caelum roscida pennis  
mille trahens varios adverso sole colores  
devolat et supra caput astitit.

(IV, 696-702)

[To be concluded]

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ROBERT J. HENLE, S. J.

#### Notes

1. Dawson, Christopher, *The Modern Dilemma* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1932), p. 26.
2. I do not mean that philosophy must achieve its purpose by oversimplification. There have been great minds whose philosophies do not deserve the title "sectarian" as I have used it. But a Plato appears only at rare intervals. Certainly the philosophers of Vergil's time were miserable "sectarians."
3. It will be seen that in many ways I agree with the article of Mr. Bowra in *Greece and Rome* ("Aeneas and the Stoic Ideal," vol. III, October, 1933). Yet in his "sectarian" view I cannot agree with him. Many ideas Vergil undoubtedly gathered from the Augustan mixture of philosophies; he himself made them universal.

#### Ad Jesulum in Cunabulis Flentem

Nam cur, Dive Puer, tumidos jam fletus ocellos  
Irrigat, et luctus corda misella subit?  
Jesu, noster Amor, tanti quae causa doloris?  
Torpent heu! diro membra tenella gelu,  
Saevit hiems. Tu nudus, inops; et tegminis expers  
Ipsa domus, Boreae frigoribusque patet!  
Ah, precor, advenias cito, Virgo piissima, Nati  
Frigida membra fove pectore pressa tuo.

Maison St. Augustin  
Enghien, Belgium

EDWARD BRUEGGEMANN, S. J.

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## Editorial

QUICUNQUE HOS COMMENTARIOLOS LEGENT  
IIS OMNIBUS  
IN DIEM NATALEM CHRISTI INEUNTEMQUE ANNUM  
QUAE CUNQUE SUNT BONA FAUSTA FELICIA  
A DEO OPTIMO MAXIMO  
PETIMUS POSCIMUS FLAGITAMUS

Our subscribers at times remind us of the scriptural *hilaris dator*; they garnish their gift with a neat little vignette, to which we are not insensible. A word of approval is a source of encouragement, as when, for instance, "Yours faithfully," a classical teacher in England who has stood by us for years, says: "I continue to find much to stimulate in the Bulletin, and congratulate you on its continued excellence," or when the Head of the College Department of Latin somewhere in the States writes: "Is it still possible to get such-and-such issues of the Bulletin? I find the articles very fine for a class in Teachers' Latin."

To all our subscribers we say a heartfelt "Thank you!" and wish them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. This may seem meagre in the way of appreciation, but we offer it with the new-year resolution to continue to try to make the CLASSICAL BULLETIN as helpful as its limitations will permit. May we not also look to our readers to continue sending us articles that emphasize the vitality of the classical languages and literatures as mediums of secondary education?

An educator whom we had approached for a contribution to our pages replied in effect: "To help the cause of the classics I am glad to do what I can, be it ever so little. I have a very poor opinion of the education of today as a whole, and feel that, if the culture of the days gone by were given a little more scope, it would benefit the present generation. What the education and educators of the next generation will be like in case the classics are allowed to drop out of sight, I do not care

to picture to myself." "More culture" and "More culture through adhesion to the classical tradition" is what one hears in private conversation with serious men and women, or gathers from their correspondence. One could wish that sentiments such as these were proclaimed from the house-tops with more insistence from one end of the land to the other. One has reason to fear that, as a group, the classical teachers of this country are too restrained in pressing upon the vast non-classical public the faith that is in them.

## Book Review

*Aids to Greek Grammar*, by D. E. Hammer, S.J., 2nd Ed., 1936. Fordham University Press, New York City, N. Y., 30 Pp. 25c postpaid.

This little book can be recommended as something different from other grammars, and as a real aid both to teachers and students.

Those who have already mastered the grammar may use it for quick reference and for review. The essentials in both accidence and syntax are given in so compendious a form that they can be found without difficulty. For instance, the *mi*-verbs are treated in two pages, the syntax of the moods and tenses in seven. There are a number of original features in the book, for example, a mnemonic summary of the moods and tenses of dependent verbs in thirteen lines. The synoptic method of presentation is followed wherever possible, as in the case of pronouns, prepositions, and mute verbs. The List of Verbs is especially welcome.

As a text to be followed in the first study of grammar, the *Aids* requires an experienced teacher, because the extreme brevity of treatment necessarily calls for explanation. On the other hand, this brevity is one of its chief recommendations. The twenty-five pages cover the ground so well that the student who has mastered them is ready to take up the Greek authors. J. H. F.

## Six Reasons Why Latin Is Not Studied

Latin should be in the curriculum of every school deserving the name of school; and if it be neglected or shelved to make room for some other study, that other study can be nothing else than a substitute, and a very poor one at that. Without discussing them for the present, I would suggest six causes which I believe responsible for the sad plight of Latin in our days.

1. Ignorance of the real value of studying Latin.
2. The hard and persevering effort which the learning of Latin, to be worth the time spent on it, calls for.
3. A slump and loss of orientation in education, just like the slumps we have in business, economics, etc.
4. The opposition of not a few presidents of colleges to the classics.
5. Negligence on the part of teachers and inability to make the study of Latin a live study.
6. Educational propaganda, or, more correctly, propaganda in education; for, those mainly responsible for present conditions draw their salaries as members of the so-called Colleges of Education.

Cincinnati, Ohio

M. G. MATTINGLY

### Latin at the Crossroads

Can Latin be kept in the curriculum of the Catholic college and secondary school of the future in this country, save for the few who will make of it a major subject and pursue its study for a period of years? The declining number of students who elect to study Latin when it can be avoided, together with the apparent willingness of some Catholic colleges to dispense with it altogether, have conspired to make this question increasingly serious. If the Catholic colleges and secondary schools fail to retain Latin in the curriculum, what can be looked for from schools and colleges that do not have the same interest in its retention? The liturgy, history, and philosophy of the Catholic Church would seem to indicate how essential Latin is for the entire background of Catholic culture, while the fact that in the Church Latin is still a living language, would seem to argue its supreme importance. The pressure of the all but universal tendency to discard all classical study, except for the specialist, cannot but be felt by Catholic institutions of learning. If, however, the Catholic school or college once abandons the teaching of Latin, its reinstatement in the curriculum will be well-nigh impossible, and the loss will be irreparable.

The present situation has produced strange anomalies, as e.g. the State University, of which the writer heard but recently, that has found it necessary to introduce into the college curriculum courses in beginners' Latin, to accommodate the students who wish to learn some Latin, but had had no opportunity to do so in the high schools which they had attended. Also one recently met with a science professor in a Catholic college who announced his intention to devote the summer holiday to studying Latin, because his experience in concentrating attention upon the study and teaching of natural science had convinced him that a reading knowledge of Latin was an essential which he had neglected.

For a long time past, the declining numbers of those studying Latin and the general waning of interest in classical studies have been discounted by the confident statement, constantly reiterated, that a reaction would soon set in; that the return to classical studies would most certainly come within a few years. In the meantime in one public high school of twelve hundred students, known to the writer, the number of those who were studying Latin has been decreasing at the rate of 30 per cent each year for several years. This is typical of a very large number of such schools throughout the country. The mathematician may amuse himself with computing the period of time required for this number to reach the vanishing point, but the practical situation remains that within a few years, unless drastic changes are made in both the method of appeal and the manner in which Latin is presented in our secondary schools, the rank and file of young Americans will have no opportunity to study Latin, and few indeed will they be who will wish to begin with the elements, once they have entered college.

Recent experiences have suggested to the present writer three lines along which the necessary changes might be made. A conversation with two Harvard seniors suggested two of these changes. These two students,

both of whom were offering history as their major subject, stated quite frankly that they could not read a complete sentence in the Missal. One went so far as to say that he skipped all footnotes and references in Latin, unless they were translated. And yet these two students, although they had studied no Latin during their college course, had had not less than five years of Latin before entering college.

The conclusion seemed obvious that Latin had never been presented to these youths as a possible tool for future use. Nor had its relation to everyday interests ever been made apparent. It had been merely a subject in which a passing grade had to be attained; a discipline to be endured. Moreover, it had patently never been clearly related to other subjects in which they were definitely interested, subjects of practical daily experience. Perhaps they had been told, as one has known other young students to be told, that the relation between classical Latin and the Latin of the Church was so remote as barely to exist.

At present the study of Latin suffers from extreme theories on either side. The conservative classicist can conceive of nothing but the long-established and time-honored sequence for the secondary school curriculum. A year devoted to drill in paradigms and syntax, followed by a year of Caesar's Commentaries; then a group of Cicero's Orations, and finally six books of the Aeneid. This all but universally accepted sequence has probably done more than any other single element to destroy all interest in Latin for the average student in modern times, and to persuade him that Latin is a subject quite remote from all his practical concerns. At the opposite extreme are the progressives, whose textbooks, profusely and sometimes tastefully illustrated, abounding in material regarding Roman life and kindred subjects, aim to develop in the student comprehension, a rapidly acquired (though unhappily inaccurate) ability to read, and a certain amount of diffuse information regarding the derivations of English words, the government of the Roman republic and its conquests, mythology, and legendary history. A number of years of experience with students whose Latin in secondary schools had followed these modern lines, has demonstrated convincingly that, while they had quite as strong a distaste for Latin as those whose training had been in the conservative school, they had no greater realization of the possibilities for the use of Latin in connection with other subjects, and, moreover, had never learned to translate with any degree of accuracy or assurance.

Our first need is for a new attitude in both teacher and pupil. From the very outset Latin must be emphasized for its practical usefulness, primarily in the study of literature, but also for the study of history, philosophy, and other subjects. A contest conducted last year among college freshmen in translating and estimating the usefulness of the Latin phrases used in current issues of Catholic periodicals, demonstrated quite clearly that the average student could not translate many of these phrases, and hoped that the sense would still be obvious if they were omitted. A single issue of "The Month" yielded about sixty such phrases, while an issue of "The Catholic World" produced nearly fifty. It became obvious in a short time that

these phrases continued to be used in our own day because they expressed something which the English translation could not express nearly as well.

Emphasis must be laid upon all footnotes and references in Latin, which are met with in connection with other subjects. It is obvious that the average student is expected to be able to translate these, and the practical value should be readily apparent.

The great opportunity in Catholic schools, however, lies in the use of the Missal. It is, indeed, an anomalous situation that, along with the development of interest in liturgy throughout the Church, Catholic students should be ignorant of the liturgy in Latin, and frequently unable to translate it. It will doubtless seem to many a most impractical suggestion, but the present writer believes firmly that the Latin of the Church should be taught along with classical Latin from the very beginning. He believes that such differences of syntax as the expression of purpose and the object clause can be taught more effectively by constantly contrasting the classical with the mediaeval syntax (emphasizing the fact that the latter corresponds more closely with the idiom of the modern languages), than can the classical syntax when taught by itself. Sentences can constantly be done in the two different ways.

This suggests the third great objective. There can be no real power in any language until the student has learned to express himself in that language. To speak Latin is, for the average American student, almost an impossibility. Nor is it particularly desirable. But the ability to write Latin that is really Latin, that expresses exactly a definite thought, must be a primary aim in all effective teaching which would not destroy the reality of Latin study by converting it into a mere pastime or guessing game. The varieties of 'synthetic Latin' to be found in many of the modern elementary textbooks, the substitution of Latin crossword puzzles for solid work in prose, and the guessing contests which to-day pass under the name of 'adaptability tests', are rapidly undermining all real grasp of the language.

If these objectives are valid, not only must there be a new outlook and aim on the part of both teacher and pupil, but a new type of textbook must be evolved. The old-fashioned type of book for beginners' Latin, which contained little more than paradigms, rules of syntax, and carefully prepared translations both from English into Latin and *vice versa*, must still be the model. Exactness in translation must be a primary objective, and guessing must be rigidly outlawed. In addition, however, to this inevitably dull material, there should be the constant aim to correlate the Latin grammar with English grammar. Now that 'Language study', or some other modern substitute, has supplanted the old-fashioned study of English grammar, that the subjunctive has all but disappeared in modern American writers of English, the need for this correlation has become increasingly important. Also, from the beginning, short vocabularies of words which occur frequently in the Missal, the contrasting of divergent syntax when it is encountered, the introduction of reading exercises from the Gospels and the easier parts of the Missal, will at once provide practical exercises for each bit of Latin that has been acquired, and will immediately convince

the student that he can put his Latin to some everyday use.

A new type of book must likewise be devised for the second, third and fourth years. Probably Caesar's Commentaries have caused a higher mortality in modern Latin students than the Gallic Wars ever did in Gallic or Germanic lives. And yet the figure of Julius Caesar, his life and attainments, the events of the closing days of the Roman republic and the beginning of the empire, have a perennial interest, as can be seen both in the popularity of recent histories of the period written in the form of fiction, and in the constant references to real or imagined parallels between those days and our own. A biography of Caesar in relation to his times, composed of suitable passages from various authors, with but the barest minimum from the Gallic Wars, might be made both interesting and attractive. The Augustan age provides ample material for interesting selections which would paint a picture of the period and of its outstanding characters. These are merely suggestions to be worked out in detail, but the essential point is that there must be a change both in the type of textbook and in its appeal.

Continuously with material, biographical and historical, from ancient Rome, should be introduced selections from the Catholic writings of the Middle Ages and some of the treasures of the Church in Latin verse as well as in prose. The aim of the Catholic secondary school, as of the Catholic college, ought not to be identical with that of non-Catholic institutions of learning. This fact must be accepted, as well as the curriculum prepared with it in view, if the Catholic schools and colleges are faithfully to perform their proper functions. In the final analysis this must include the preparation of a new type of textbook for Catholic secondary schools to meet the needs and problems of the present day.

A change in outlook is needed if the modern American is not to lose his traditional culture and sanity. He must be led back to the ancient spring of the humanities. He must be made to realize that it is in the traditional culture of Western Europe, which expressed itself in the then universal language of Western Christendom, that the antidote to the revolutionary and godless spirit of the age must be found. The function of the Catholic school or college in this crisis must be, primarily, to conserve all that is best in the Christian humanistic culture of the past. This cannot be achieved if Latin is to sink into significance in the curriculum of any of our schools or colleges. In these challenging circumstances, drastic changes must unquestionably be made. Are these present suggestions worthy of discussion, and, perhaps, of a fair trial?

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L. B. HOLSAPPLE.

A religion which looks to ultimate triumph coming through sacrifice and suffering is a higher and stronger creed than any facile optimism, and it is such a religion which we meet in Virgil . . . Virgil, the philosopher and the poet, as he looked on life and tried to interpret it, had probed something of the secret which lay at the heart of Christianity.—Cyril Bailey.

### A Lovely Impracticability

Many are the lovely impracticabilities urged upon Latin teachers as goals. For a conspicuous place among these L.I.'s, I venture to nominate the metrical reading of Virgil. Last year, for example, with a good class, well grounded, after having speeded up the study of *Pro Archia*, after having diminished considerably the amount of themework in the last semester, I found time to achieve only a very mediocre success in this metrical matter.<sup>1</sup> It is true that the class covered two entire books of the *Aeneid*, which is more than syllabi usually require; but two books, surely, are a minimum intelligent acquaintance with Virgil. To me, Virgil, and at least two books of him, is fourth-year Latin.

During the whole of the first week of our Virgil study, while at home we were reading the first six books in translation, in class we were studying the fundamental rules of prosody and trying our hand at the hexameter. At the end of that first week, we had made but scant progress. I saw that, if we had to wait to start reading Virgil until we could read him metrically (the ideal!), we should be fortunate to complete a single book. I considered doing a bit of practice-reading and scansion as a part of each day's class, but rejected the plan for two reasons. (1) It would take time from translation and thus prevent us from traveling as fast as I considered necessary for the sake of interest. (2) It would take time from discussion, introducing instead a constantly recurring mechanical element and hampering our attempt to read along easily, interestedly, "for the story and the people in it." What time I could spare from the translation and parsing necessary to get at the meaning, I preferred to spend in spirited sense-reading by the students, metrical reading by myself, and then discussion.

Besides, I did have a plan whereby, with great economy of time, I hoped to have most of the class reading metrically at the end of the year. Of course, the class would not, then, have that ability to use *during* the year. Less lovely, but, I hoped, less impracticable, too. The class understood the rules governing meter, as I explained before, and heard some metrical reading every day. My plan was simply to let this latter have its natural effect. I looked for the growth of a gradual sense for the dactyl and hexameter; a sense so well rooted after seven months of growth that it could be brought up into a quick blossom in June under the stimulus of a little explicit reading practice.

A daffodil bulb, planted in the fall, slowly prepared by the natural forces of soil and snow, shoots up in the spring at any light touch of sun and rain. If you have green oak to split, save it for the last of the year's chores; give it time to season. So I reasoned for this matter of meter; and so it worked out. The last two weeks of the year we devoted to the review of the two books we had covered. For the first time, part of each night's assignment was the preparation of a certain number of lines for metrical reading: the first twenty lines by this row, the next twenty by the next row, and so on until the hundred or more lines called for by each night's review were covered. The next day we had the

reading, usually at the end of the class, as a kind of dessert. Net result at the end of the two weeks: about three could read at sight, and all could handle satisfactorily any assigned lines.

The time-gain consisted, of course, in the abolition of a long period of faltering practice-reading. The reading which I did for the class, and which would have had to be done in any case, shortened considerably the necessity for such a period. I think the process of hidden growth was stimulated and directed by allowing the class to try their skill occasionally on a fine passage of a few lines, and especially by having them memorize, with correct meter, such passages or lines.<sup>2</sup>

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St. Marys, Kansas

JOSEPH M. BECKER, S. J.

1. The "metrical" reading referred to in this article is quantitative reading, the only kind that is worth the trouble. It seems to me that stressing the metrical ictus loses as much in poetic power by the fantastic violence it does to the natural word-accent as it gains by the rhythm it introduces.
2. The introduction to Bennett's text of Virgil has a couple of hundred lines for practice-reading, selected from the *Aeneid* and arranged in groups according to degree of difficulty.

### Discussion of Mr. Becker's Paper (I)

I, too, must admit the utter futility of getting some classes to read Vergil metrically. More than one June has found me hopelessly voicing just such a conviction as that of my *confrère*. Yes, this metrical reading of Vergil is a lovely impracticability sometimes, but not always.

I have found that with a class, well grounded in the things that make for facilitating a working knowledge of quantitative structure, this fourth-year problem is solved with little or no difficulty. The lovely impracticability is soon made to reach the vanishing point, and that, far sooner than any teacher might have expected. Here again, it is the little things that count.

Classes can be well grounded in various phases of the subject of Latin, such as its numberless inflectional forms, its use of words, or its rules for style and syntax; but are these altogether essential to acquiring skill in metrical reading? Students may be alert in grasping a writer's intended effect, or quick to appreciate his rhetorical vesture;<sup>1</sup> they may display an interest in the charm of his theme or story; they may even excel in the minutiae of syntax; but let me venture to say, that these, although worthy of our heartiest approval, are not, taken by themselves, the best-fitted soil for planting the seeds of the rhythm of poetry. Something still is lacking, something almost too trivial to mention.

What soil could be found more unfriendly to a teacher's planting, for instance, than a class with memories stored with word-forms completely wanting in quantity? Ask any student in such a class to parse aloud some noun in any declension. You gasp with horror at what you hear! The case-ending in every instance is given a terrific ictus. But case-endings were learned in First-High, in this, and in no other, way. What mattered the violence done to the quantity of every word which the student acquired then and during the subsequent years! To get him now to move those accents to the place where they rightly belong is a task no less forbidding, perhaps, than the transfer of mountains. Add to this deplorable condition his meager knowledge of word-grouping, and you are driven to declare that the goal, urged upon you, cannot be attained.

Given a class, then, well trained in correct pronunciation and in the accurate recognition of word-groups, there is just one thing more required,—the *vox viva*

<sup>1</sup> See THE CLASSICAL BULLETIN, October, 1936, p. 3.

*magistri*. This is in Fourth-High, as it was in the three years before, the most important factor in this matter of metrical reading. I should say, an all but indispensable one. For, if the student learns pronunciation at all, he learns it through the speaking voice of the teacher. What is true of pronunciation is likewise true of metrical reading. The ear rather than the eye is the proper avenue of approach. A sense for the dactyl and the hexameter can be acquired during the first few days of the school year, by committing to memory a dozen or more lines from Longfellow's *Evangeline*. By listening to the metrical reading of Vergil done for them every day by the teacher for a week or two, without any reference to rules of scansion, they are soon forced to inquire about the mechanics behind it. Now is the time to tell them that any one who can read prose quantitatively has a good start in reading verse; now is the time, too, to challenge them to get the metrical swing of the verse at the first attack. The student has no need of knowing that long lists of rules have been fashioned, with their numberless ramifications, to aid him now in this new and difficult task. Sufficient for him now, and for many more weeks to come, are the few but fundamental facts laid down by Fr. Hugh P. O'Neill in his excellent article entitled, *Read Vergil by Ear*.<sup>2</sup>

Such a method as the above works when Fourth-High students are ready for it. If they are not, I know no way of imparting to them this ocean roll of rhythm. For me, as for Mr. J. M. Becker, it must remain the same lovely impracticability.

Rosati-Kain High School,  
St. Louis, Missouri

SISTER HELEN IRENE, C. S. J.

<sup>2</sup> THE CLASSICAL BULLETIN, March, 1932.

#### Discussion (II)

Both writers evidently arrive at the same conclusion—that in the metrical reading of Latin verse the *vox magistri* is the only correct starting-point, and, after the student's ear has become accustomed to the metrical movement, he may try it himself, guided by a minimum of rules for the structure of the verse and for quantity. A few minutes devoted to this practice every day for several weeks ought to produce satisfying results in an average class. The minimum of rules, I suppose, would include the poet's free choice of dactyls or spondee in the first four feet, the regular "strawberry ice cream" rhythm of the last two feet, the verse pause, and "the few but fundamental facts" laid down by Fr. O'Neill.

This is a good working scheme for beginners, it is true. But is it defensible to stop here? Ought we not to aim to reach a more or less accurate knowledge of quantity before the end of the year? Can we afford to ignore the rules of prosody without running the risk of reducing metrical reading to the "hit-or-miss" practice that results from guessing?

The metrical ictus? Sr. Helen Irene favors it, Mr. Becker condemns it. However, if the stress laid on the first syllable of the foot is very slight, the student will be able to feel the swing of the metre, and at the same time no "fantastic violence" will be done to the natural word-accent. To allow this slight metrical stress will reduce the "impracticability" to a minimum.

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Saint Louis, Missouri

OTTO J. KUHNMUECH, S. J.

**Editorial Note**—The complete rules of prosody have been reduced by Fr. Kuhnmuensch to a few mnemonic keywords, in a 3-page leaflet entitled "Rules for the Rhythmic Reading of Vergil." Of this over twenty thousand copies have been distributed during the last ten years. It may be obtained from the author at \$2 per hundred.

With regard to the "lovely impracticability," Mr. Becker begs us, in a private letter, not to overlook the "two cardinal features" of his position: "(1) I wanted quantitative reading, not stress reading; (2) I wanted to take, and did take, *two entire books* of the Aeneid.

I do not here justify either of the two objects; I assume them. I discussed Number (2) in "A Goal and a Way to It," published in the November BULLETIN; and hence, there would be a target *here* for enemy guns. As to Number (1), there could hardly be a fight; there is not even a straw man to knock over."

When all is said, there is really less divergence in the opinions voiced above than appears. For the success of her experiment, Sr. Helen Irene postulates a class already well trained in quantitative pronunciation and possessed of skill in recognizing word-groups. Mr. Becker, on the other hand, in his laudable desire to read two entire books evidently lacked the time to supply this want to a degree satisfactory to himself. Again, he is not interested in a metrical ictus doing "fantastic violence" to the natural word-accent. But, surely, there is a *via media*, and he would, we believe, admit that consistent quantitative reading of verse is apt, or, rather, bound, almost imperceptibly to glide over into that "slight-stress" reading to which Fr. K. refers. Many years ago, during a public reading given by Professor Bennett, who had then pinned his faith to quantitative reading pure and simple, the audience noticed, if he did not, that his effort to mark *quantity* resulted in a distinctly discernible *stress* on the first syllable of every dactyl and spondee. Happily, the three parties to the present controversy are all agreed on what is really essential: that the Vergilian hexameter must be read as poetry, and not as prose.

Music and architecture rest on mathematics; and no one denies to the votaries of music and architecture the due appreciation of their arts because of counterpoint, because of studies as to the strength of material. The very love of art forbids the neglect of any detail, and the quest of some principle, the effort to get exact expression for every manifestation of spiritual life, is not unworthy of the highest intellectual faculties. Wherever there is true art there is law, however it may hide itself under the facts, and this recognition of law lifts the study of literary art out of the domain of elegant trifling and carries it into a region where art and science meet.—B. L. Gildersleeve.

The Greek is recognized as being one of the most perfect languages that has ever existed. However paradoxical it may appear, I find the perfection of this language to be largely in the absence of every exclusive or unconditional rule. Take a Greek grammar and examine the chapter on the correspondence of the tenses, modes, hypothetical propositions, or any other, and you will find everywhere that one is allowed to make all possible combinations. The grammar does not give the inexorable law; it allows the mind complete liberty to choose what can best express all the delicate shades of his thought.—HENRI WEIL

We can never entirely get away from our roots in the past; that past which repeatedly revenges itself on our scorn of it by becoming again a present.—W. Kane, S. J.

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